

February 13, 2013

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Montana State Legislature  
P.O. Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Dear House Appropriations Committee Members:

The Little Shell Tribe is very disappointed by Representative Champ Edmunds' successful motion to reduce Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) funding in the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government. Representative Edmunds' proposal to reduce a successful program's funding by 50%, based on the assumption that the Tribes should have used ICED funding to assist the *state funded and operated* TANF program in reducing the number of participants in that program is ill-conceived. The state-recognized Little Shell Tribe does not have a TANF program nor does it monitor the number of Little Shell that are in the program, due in part to TANF being a State program (not a Tribal program) and TANF's social service focus whereas the Little Shell Tribe's ICED activities are focused on economic development. The ICED program funding should not be reduced because the Little Shell did not track Representative Edmund's arbitrary, non-negotiated, after-the-fact measurement, nor should we be expected to use economic development funds to support a state funded social welfare program. That responsibility lies with the State Department of Public Health and Human Services, not the Little Shell Tribe, nor the Montana Department of Commerce.

Representative Edmunds proposes that \$400,000 in funds be removed from ICED and be made available to Tribes under the Workforce Training Grant (WTG) Program. The Little Shell Tribe is not a directly eligible applicant to the WTG Program, nor are any of the Tribes in Montana. In the history of the WTG Program, *only one tribal entity*, Integrated Solutions (Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes), *has ever received funding*; \$35,000 for training seven individuals.

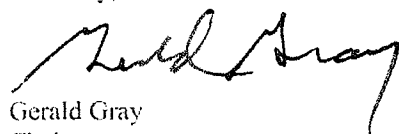
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Does Representative Edmunds (really) believe that Tribes will have equal access to funding in a program to which they are not directly eligible applicants? Further, the primary sector business limitation makes this program available only to a handful of businesses that export 50% or more of their product outside of the state. Historic funding of the WTG program proves his access premise is wrong. Montana's healthy economy is much more diverse than domestic and international export businesses. The Little Shell Tribe would have little to no access to economic development funding if ICED monies are reduced or transferred to the WTG Program.

In the absence of a tribal land or tax base, market, or infrastructure, the entrepreneurial Little Shell Tribe has innovated to be an economically viable Tribe. All tribes know the importance and impact of economic development within our communities. The Little Shell Tribe's communities of Great Falls, Missoula, Helena, and Billings have all benefited from ICED funding through property sales and taxes, professional services and the purchases of goods and equipment. We more than matched every ICED dollar made available to us. Our economic development strategy includes tourism and acquisition of real estate assets, both of which generate income and jobs over time. In 2012 the ICED program helped the Little Shell Tribe start a visitor/cultural center at the base of historic Hill 57 in Great Falls. This center fits into Great Falls' larger tourism strategic plan to link several historic and cultural activities into a richer, longer and more revenue-rich tourism experience. Additionally, ICED funds have supported eight Little Shell tribal-member businesses throughout the state. These small businesses create jobs and ultimately train future generations on how to start, run, and maintain a viable business. Not only does the ICED program help prevent poverty and create jobs, it is the little fire that ignites and showcases Montana's strong entrepreneurial spirit and confirms Montana's support of businesses, large and small.

If the ICED program is not funded, it may appear that State Representatives individually and the Legislature as a whole are sending a message, not only to Indian Country, but also to each of your communities that you do not support economic development or a healthy diverse economy. We ask that you fully restore the ICED program at \$800,000 per year in base budget.

Sincerely,



Gerald Gray  
Chairman  
Little Shell Tribe